13. Helping Readers to Use the Library

What can you do to encourage readers to use the library?

The library should be a place people enjoy visiting, so try to make it a friendly place. In the past, libraries had many rules. Some librarians even refused to allow readers to talk in the library building. Today’s librarians think that is an unhelpful rule. If readers are confused about something, let them ask their friends for help first. If they read a book or magazine article they enjoy, let them tell their friends about it. Talking quietly in the library should be allowed, as long as other readers are not distracted.

Students must also be taught how to use their library so that they feel confident to find the information they need for their studies. Primary schoolteachers should make sure children know as much as possible about the library. The roots of a good education are put down at a young age and the same is true for library skills. Encourage children to visit the library and choose their own reading books.

Is the library for enjoyment or study?

The library is a place to study, but think for a moment about how you learn best. It is much easier to learn if you are enjoying a subject. Libraries contain information for life. If you show students how a library works whilst they are still at school, then they will continue to use libraries after they leave. They will also be able to help their families and friends to use libraries, not only to find information but also to borrow books to read for pleasure.

The key point to remember is that students must understand that the aims of the library are to help their studies and their English reading skills and to provide leisure books. But to achieve these aims, you must make the library an enjoyable place. Show students that the library is a lot more than another classroom.
How do you make the library interesting for readers?

One of the best ways to attract readers to the library is to orient them with three basic ‘library tours’. The first will be about books, the second about how the library works, and the third will address the use of stock in the library.

Before each library tour, plan what you want to say, taking care to keep your message simple. Before you start, estimate how many people will fit into the library. Make sure that every person on your library tour will be able to see the things you are pointing out. If you have student library assistants, they can lead the tours after they are trained.

Orientation: the book tour: all about books

Do your readers know much about books? The purpose of this tour is to help readers become much more familiar with books. It is usually worth explaining some library terms to them. You could ask each reader to find a book and then go through the following points together.

- The book’s name (e.g. Petals of Blood) is usually called its title.
- The person who wrote the book (e.g. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o) is called the writer or author.
- Petals of Blood is a story book. Story books are sometimes called fiction books or novels. You can identify a fiction book by its spine label. Petals of Blood will have a spine label reading ‘F.T’. The ‘F’ stands for
‘fiction’ and the ‘T’ is short for the author’s last name, Thiong’o.

• Now ask readers the title of the book they are holding. Who is the author? Encourage people to point out where the title and author’s name are written. These are usually on the spine, on the book jacket or front cover, and in the front of the book on the title page. If readers can learn to identify these parts of the book with no problems, this will be a great help to you.

• Point out the library’s name and the return date label, which tells readers when books that they borrow should be returned to the library.

• Explain that books are fragile. Show people how to turn pages and explain the importance of using bookmarks. Tell readers that they should always have clean hands when handling books, and that if they borrow a book they must keep it in a clean, dry, and safe place.

• Show readers an information (non-fiction) book. Point out the contents page. Explain that it is usually at the front of the book and that it lists the main subjects the book’s author has written about. Show everyone the index. Explain that it is usually at the back of the book and that it lists topics alongside a page number. If readers then turn to that page, they will find information about the topic.

• Ask how people think they could find what they are looking for in an information book. Listen to their ideas and then prove the usefulness of the contents page. Ask readers to work in pairs and use the contents and index pages in your library’s information books to find out about a particular topic (e.g. flags).

• To finish off the lesson, ask the younger children to draw some of the flags they have found. Ask older students or adults to find out when the flag was first designed and some more information about the country.

This will probably be enough information for the readers’ first library tour. Make sure you ask if they have any
questions. Congratulate them for doing so well and invite them to come back to the library soon.

**Orientation: the library tour: how the library works**

The aim of this tour is to explain how the library works and how readers can use it. The following points are recommended as the basis for this tour:

- Explain that books are divided into two main sections: fiction and information (non-fiction) books. Point out the difference between these books by saying that fiction books are stories and that all other books are for looking up or reading about facts or information about the world.

- Show readers where the bookshelves are and how books are filed from left to right, top to bottom. All shelves have shelf guides that indicate what books are kept on those shelves.

- Take the readers to the fiction section. Explain that you must use the alphabet to find your favourite author’s book. Tell everyone that books are arranged in alphabetical order, so that all the books by authors whose last name starts with the same letter (e.g. ‘A’) are kept together. All the books by authors whose last name starts with A will be together and will have a spine label marked ‘F.A’. All the books by authors whose last name starts with B will also be kept together and will have a spine label marked ‘F.B’, and so on until you reach Z. For tips about teaching alphabetical filing, see chapters 9 and 14.

- Hold up a book such as *The Flute* by Chinua Achebe. This should be shelved in the A section because Achebe’s last name starts with A. *Cutting for Stone* by Abraham Verghese would be on the bookshelves with other books by authors whose last name starts with V.

- Go to the information bookshelves. Explain that information books are divided (or classified) into subjects. Ask readers to suggest a favourite subject. If it is sport, then indicate where the sports books are.
Point out the wall chart or poster that shows where to find books on sports. Explain that the coloured labels or stickers make it easier to find the books you want. Check that everyone understands the system: if books with a purple sticker are for sports information, ask them in which section they would find a book on basketball. They will have to look at the wall chart to find the answer: all sports books have a purple spine label and the classification number 700. Make up your own examples from your library’s stock.

- Point out that if readers want quick answers, they should go to the reference section. These books contain so much information and are usually so expensive that libraries do not lend them, to prevent loss. Make sure everyone knows how to use a dictionary, an encyclopaedia, etc.

- Say that all fiction books and all information books, except those in the reference section, can be borrowed. Explain briefly how borrowing works.

- Explain that there is other stock in the library besides books – subject files, project boxes, magazines, audio-visual equipment, etc. Show people where these are and what kinds of information they can expect to find.

- Introduce the library monitors and perhaps members of the library committee.

- Review the library rules and operating hours.

- For homework, ask the students to pair up and draw a map of the library showing where the stock is kept. Check that students fill in as much information as possible on their map. You could display the best maps on the library wall, perhaps close to the entrance.

**Orientation: the skills tour: using the library**

The purpose of this tour is to develop the skills that readers will need to use the library properly. It follows on from the previous tour. Tell readers to work in pairs with the map they made at the end of the last tour.
• Ask readers to go and find specific items that you select based on your stock. For example, you could ask them to find:
  _ A news story in *Time* magazine about a pop group (e.g. UB40)
  _ A quick answer about the type of bean chocolate is made from (this should be from an encyclopaedia in the reference section)
  _ The fiction book *Sosu’s Call* by Meshack Asare

• Once you know students can find their way around the library, devise a treasure hunt and play the Treasure Hunt Game (see below).

• Always encourage readers to ask questions. If you see some people are having problems understanding the library, explain again. Try to give them a special lesson that involves learning by doing. People learn faster if they have to do things (you could make up a personal treasure hunt to help a reader with particular difficulties).

• Encourage people to help each other find books. If someone still has problems, think of a new and simpler way to explain how the library works or help them find books until they get used to it.

**Treasure Hunt Game**

Tell students to find a particular page in a book, say page 8 of *Dancing in the Dust* by Kagiso Lesego Molope.

When they find that page, they will also find a clue card (made by you) telling them to go to, say, page 91 of the thesaurus (kept in the reference section). Each clue card will direct students to another book. This is a very good way to introduce the title catalogue.

**How to use signs and posters in the library**

Putting up signs around the library will help people to use it and will also make the library look more interesting.
**Information shelf guides**

These signs tell people which books are on each shelf. Draw them in neat letters and pin them (with drawing pins) above the correct shelves (e.g. history, English, business studies, craft, science). Look back at figure 10.3 in chapter 10 for an example.

**Skill level guides**

If your readers have very different levels of ability in English, try to grade all fiction books and use stickers to show the different levels. At a primary school, or for a classroom library, you could use a circle for ‘beginning to read’, a square for ‘moving on’, and a triangle for ‘longer stories’. If you are using colour coding for subject classification, we recommend that you avoid colour coding for skill level markers.

Put up a sign showing what the symbols mean. This will help readers choose the right book for their age and skill level. The descriptions you choose are very important. Terms such as ‘beginning to read’, ‘moving on’, and ‘longer stories’ encourage people much more than subjective terms such as ‘easy’ and ‘difficult’. A book is not easy for...
a beginner reader; it is only easy for a literate adult (see chapter 9 for more on fiction classification systems). You could put some of the simpler reading books into a browser box (see chapter 3) or on a shelf to encourage children to decide which book they would like to read. In Botswana primary school libraries, they call very simple books ‘snack books’. The librarians encourage the children to read one of these books when they arrive as a warm-up, before they move on to a book at their reading level.

**Figure 13.2.** The ‘snack corner’ label on the top of the cabinet means that the books displayed there are for readers to start with before they move on to more difficult books (Botswana).

**Library opening times**
A sign or poster that clearly shows when the library is open and when it is closed encourages people to come at the right time and avoids disappointment.

**Library rules**
You can also make and display useful signs with rules and tips on, for example, how to treat books well, how to borrow books, etc. Encourage people to obey the library’s rules by using friendly reminders such as ‘using bookmarks..."
makes books last longer’ instead of negative statements such as ‘do not bend pages’. Some libraries write friendly reminders on paper bookmarks that they hand out to users. This is a nice way to get people to read and obey the rules.

How else can you attract people to the library?

Figure 13.3. Plants in the library make it beautiful (Lesotho).

Make the library look attractive
There are many ways to make the library a pleasant place to visit. Here are some ideas:

• Paint it.
• Hang curtains in the windows.
• Have fresh flowers or plants on the librarian’s table.
• Put up colourful displays.
• Make comfortable places for people to sit and read (for pleasure rather than for study).

Some of these may prove difficult, but all of them will encourage readers to enjoy going to the library.
LIBRARY TIP

To promote literacy and attract students to the library, occasionally write a message such as ‘Ask the librarian for a sweet’ and post it on the library door. Then be prepared with a bag of sweets to pass out to the careful readers (take the sign down before all the sweets are gone).

Hold regular library activities

Encourage people to become involved with the library. One way to do this is to start a library club to help train student or community librarians and to give you some help running the library and preparing, returning, and mending books.

Without this (help), running the school library is a mammoth and impossible task for one person. If your students are actively involved in such work, they will naturally take a pride in the library, and feel it is their library.

- Chris Lane, Kenya

LIBRARY TIP

Hold fun activities for library club members to help them get to know the stock. One method is to introduce new books and types of books (e.g. crime stories) by reading an exciting section or chapter. When you have finished reading, ask a few questions about the content to check that everyone has understood the action. Find out if they liked the story. If they did, tell them where to find similar books.

If you find this encourages people to read more, you may decide to arrange your fiction books by type of book or genre. Many librarians organise some fiction books into separate sections, for instance:

- Thrillers
- Historical novels
• Family sagas
• Animal stories
• Ghost stories
• Mysteries
• Romance

The advantage of this system is that if someone likes a particular type of book, perhaps a romance, they will be able to find others of the same type. This is something people cannot do if fiction is arranged alphabetically by the author’s last name. Note that if you decide to divide fiction books into genres, you will first need to take a quick look at each fiction book so that you can put them into the correct section.

**Encourage suggestions**

Have a suggestions book in the library and encourage users to write down their ideas.

**Display students’ work**

Ask teachers to pass on excellent classwork, poems, and paintings to you. Then stick them on to large sheets of coloured paper and put them up with drawing pins to make a colourful wall display around the library. Ask students to help you display their work. You could give a prize for the best display. Try to coordinate major classroom topics with displays of students’ work in the library. Invite teachers and their students to organise regular exhibitions for the library. Never leave the same work displayed for a long time, as it might become torn and dirty.

The next chapter has more ideas about attracting readers to the library and promoting reading.
Opening the library checklist

☐ In a school library, give tours to all students and teachers when your library first opens, and to all new students and teachers thereafter.

☐ Remember to explain:
  _ The parts of the book (see chapter 4)
  _ How to care for books
  _ Where to find information and fiction books
  _ Any rules, especially about borrowing books

Figure 13.4. A librarian plays a game with students. Paper game boards are placed on the table and then sealed with varnish so they are part of the library furniture (Lesotho).